

DDI-1750-67

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: North Vietnam Bombing

1. This morning (22 May) I called in my dozen most experienced, knowledgeable officers who work on the Vietnam problem for a general discussion on the bombing of North Vietnam. This discussion focused on two questions:

(a) Does bombing harden the will of the North Vietnamese people?

(b) What bombing attack pattern will produce results most favorable to US interests?

2. The consensus opinion on the first question was:

(a) A distinction must be drawn between the will of the Hanoi leadership and that of the North Vietnamese people.

(b) The bombing has produced a net decline in the morale of the people, but not to the point where popular attitudes

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exert political pressure on or pose political problems for the Hanoi leadership.

(c) The bombing has probably hardened attitudes of Hanoi's leaders, i. e., the Politburo of the Communist Party. There is no bombing attack pattern which, of itself, will force the Politburo to change its strategy because of the cost inflicted on North Vietnam. Hanoi's leaders view the war as a test of wills in which they believe that, politically, they can outlast the US.

3. On the second question, my officers' consensus judgments were:

(a) Any suspension, or termination, of the bombing would be regarded by Hanoi as a victory and would intensify Hanoi's determination to persist in the struggle. It would harden Hanoi's position and would not make Hanoi more amenable to negotiation or settlement.

(b) A new attack pattern concentrating almost exclusively on targets south of the twentieth parallel would also be construed by Hanoi as a victory and produce consequences similar to those outlined above. Furthermore, North

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Vietnam would be able to concentrate its anti-aircraft capabilities in the southern part of the country and re-program human and material assets now tasked and programmed to repair bomb damage north of the twentieth parallel.

(c) Even if our entire effort were devoted to infiltration-associated communications lines and targets in route packages 1, 2 and 3, we would only augment the actual interdiction effect on infiltration (over that inflicted by present attack patterns) by a factor of about ten percent. Aerial bombardment cannot stop infiltration or reduce route capacities below the relatively small amount required to support the war in the south.

(d) The optimum attack pattern would involve concentration on infiltration-associated targets in southern North Vietnam with random attacks in the northern part of the country sufficient to prevent major redeployment of assets and restrikes on particular targets already hit whenever these show evidence of significant reconstruction or repair.

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Richard Helms

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